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THE SCHOOL AS A FORCE ARRAYED AGAINST CHILD LABOR

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The list of the social forces that are arrayed against child labor, as presented on the program of the annual meeting of the National Child Labor Committee seems so overwhelming as to lead us to suppose that the duration of this evil must be but brief. Yet, when we remember the universality of greed, the persistence of poverty, and the helplessness of childhood, we realize that this fight will not be so speedily won and that we have need of every force that can be utilized for the conflict.

If ever we, as Americans, lose enthusiasm with regard to the form of our government and its administration, it is when we see the slowness of the steps by which educational and moral reforms are secured, the difficulties in the way of securing legislation that has the universal approval of men of thought, and when we further consider the unsatisfactory administration of such laws as have been enacted. It is impossible, under our form of government, to secure by one enactment such legislation as seems necessary for the protection of our children. As the chairman of our meeting has indicated, it is not our hope to secure federal legislation on this matter; we realize that we must plead our cause not before one tribunal, but before half a hundred. In Germany it was possible for Bismarck to bring together the distracted units of Germany; one Cavour made possible a united Italy; but in America we must rally a multitude of leaders before we can bring about a reform of any kind. We therefore appeal to public opinion. We are organized to influence public opinion; we desire to present our claims to the thoughtful men and women of this country, and through them we hope to secure in every state such legislation as we believe necessary.

Within past years we have traveled far in our ideas of the state. We no longer believe that government to be best that governs least. We no longer believe in the state whose seal of authority is the badge of the policeman, whose temples are its jails and penitentiaries, whose sole duties are to protect life and property, and secure the enforcement of the commandments, "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal." We realize that a government has no higher duty, at certain times, than the preservation of its own existence by whatever force may be necessary to make secure that existence; but we believe it is the duty of the state to guard its higher life as well as its lower life, and that, in guarding its higher life, there are some things better than armies and navies, and that school-houses and churches and books are no less necessary instrumentalities for national existence than gunpowder and dynamite. Representing, therefore, the school, we represent our nation and the country's government—for the school is the state, after all, in its parental capacity. We believe in popular education, in universal education. We do not claim that this is a panacea for all ills or a remedy for all wrongs. We do not expect to see all men made wise, or just, or good. We realize that with the best we can do there will be some failures in life. On every sea some barks must go down. But we take the position that an opportunity must be given to everyone, and that every child must have the privilege of working out his own life, of developing the best that is in him—and therefore we believe that every child must have the chance of an education. We are opposed to child labor because it shuts out that opportunity, and makes education impossible.

Therefore no legislation on this subject can be satisfactory if it ignores the educational requirements of the child. The demand for an age limit in child labor is justified by hygienic laws, but a deeper philosophy lies underneath such enactments. Our problem is not merely to keep the child under sixteen out of the factory or mine, but to keep the child at work in school. The factory is better than the slums; it may be that the factory is a better place than the home, but it is never better than the school; and it is just where parental obligation has failed, just where the home has disappeared from the life of the child, that the school must step in as another home and the teacher must take the place of the parent who has deserted his charge. The school must provide for that child a new

opportunity, a new life. It is by no means sufficient to have an enactment saying the child must be able to read and write before being allowed to go to work in the factory or mine. It is not unnatural for such a child, after he has gone to work, to forget all that he has learned and to drift back into the class of hopelessly illiterate. Reading and writing is a very small requirement, when it stands as an educational test between childhood that must be protected and manhood that should look after itself; and yet, in every state in the Union, I suppose, there are children at work under the age of sixteen who can neither read nor write.

The United States Department of Commerce and Labor last year issued a bulletin making a special study of 1,381 children at work in thirteen different states. In ten out of these thirteen states there were found children at work who were unable to read and write. Mind you, taking only that small group of states,—and they were not selected especially to hunt illiteracy,—in ten of them there were found children that were wholly illiterate—and New York was one of them. Examining the statistics further to see whether there were children at work who had never been to school, it was found that there were some, likewise in ten out of the thirteen states, who had never been to school before entering upon work; while there were also a number of children who had attended for only one or two years. I must acknowledge with regret that of the states whose record was shown up in that examination four of the thirteen belonged to the South, viz.: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. There were 341 children that fell to those four Southern States. Of that number 146 were wholly illiterate, 57 had never attended school, while 198 others had attended for less than three years. That means only about fifteen months of school attendance in all, for the average term in these states is only about half an ordinary school year. It is unnecessary to remind you that a child can learn but little at school in one year of five months. It takes a good many of those terms to give enough information to become a permanent asset, a permanent part of the child's character. The little knowledge gained in that short time at school passes away in a few years after the child has left the school, and such children are destined to be entirely illiterate after spending a few years at work in the factory.

But the Southerners are not sinners above all. Let me remind

you of one of our pamphlets containing information obtained by the Pennsylvania Child Labor Committee, which shows that in the city of Philadelphia alone there are 16,000 children under the age of thirteen who are not in school, although the law says they shall be there. These children are at home waiting until they are old enough to secure work, or at work with certificates that are falsified, or perhaps, even, without certificates.

From the standpoint of the school we urge three contentions in our consideration of this subject:

I. We contend that there should be always a definite educational requirement in every child labor law. The mere establishment of an age limit is insufficient, and the requirement that the child shall be able to read and write is pitifully small. A law requiring that the child shall attend some school while at work is some improvement, but is open also to very serious objection, and in practical operation is seldom found satisfactory. A child cannot work in a factory six or eight hours a day and do intellectual work at night; and a law permitting children to work during the vacation period puts a premium on long vacations and short school terms.

II. The second principle for which we contend is that those who are interested in the education of the child shall have some voice in the execution of the law that guards that education. The making out of certificates should not be placed in the hands of notaries who are to get their fees for this operation, nor should such certificates be made out on the unsupported affidavit of parents, who may be unscrupulous in their desire to secure gain from the child's labor; but the responsibility should be placed in the hands of the men and women who are interested in the child and in its education.

III. The third point I would make is a plea for better schools and more of them. I speak on that point as a Southern man. Of all our problems, that is the problem that is most far-reaching.

We have another problem called peculiarly the Southern problem, but in my opinion the race question is not so universal a problem nor so serious a menace to our general prosperity as is the distressing fact of illiteracy and our insufficient educational opportunities. There are many living in the South who know little of any race problem through personal experience. There are many communities where peace and good will reigns and the two races are living side by side working out their tasks with mutual sympathy, for-

bearance, and friendship. But there is no State in the South, no community that is not struggling with the problem of providing better educational facilities.

We of the South are grateful for the co-operation and sympathy that has been extended to us by other sections in working out this problem. In such a task men are brought close together. The bitterness of former differences will be most quickly forgotten by those working together in a great and holy enterprise. The founder of the institution with which I am connected—himself a citizen of this city—in writing about its mission used these significant words:

“If Vanderbilt University shall, through its influence, contribute, even in a small degree, to strengthening the ties which should exist between all geographical sections of our common country, I shall feel that it has accomplished one of the objects that led me to take an interest in it.”

In that feeling of common interest and in that spirit of sacred enterprise all sections of our country must unite to promote the work of education and to repress the evils of child labor. This is a task neither for sect nor section. The cause of childhood is the cause of humanity. We lay, therefore, on the nation's heart the burden of American childhood,—ignorant and helpless to-day, but of infinite possibilities for to-morrow.